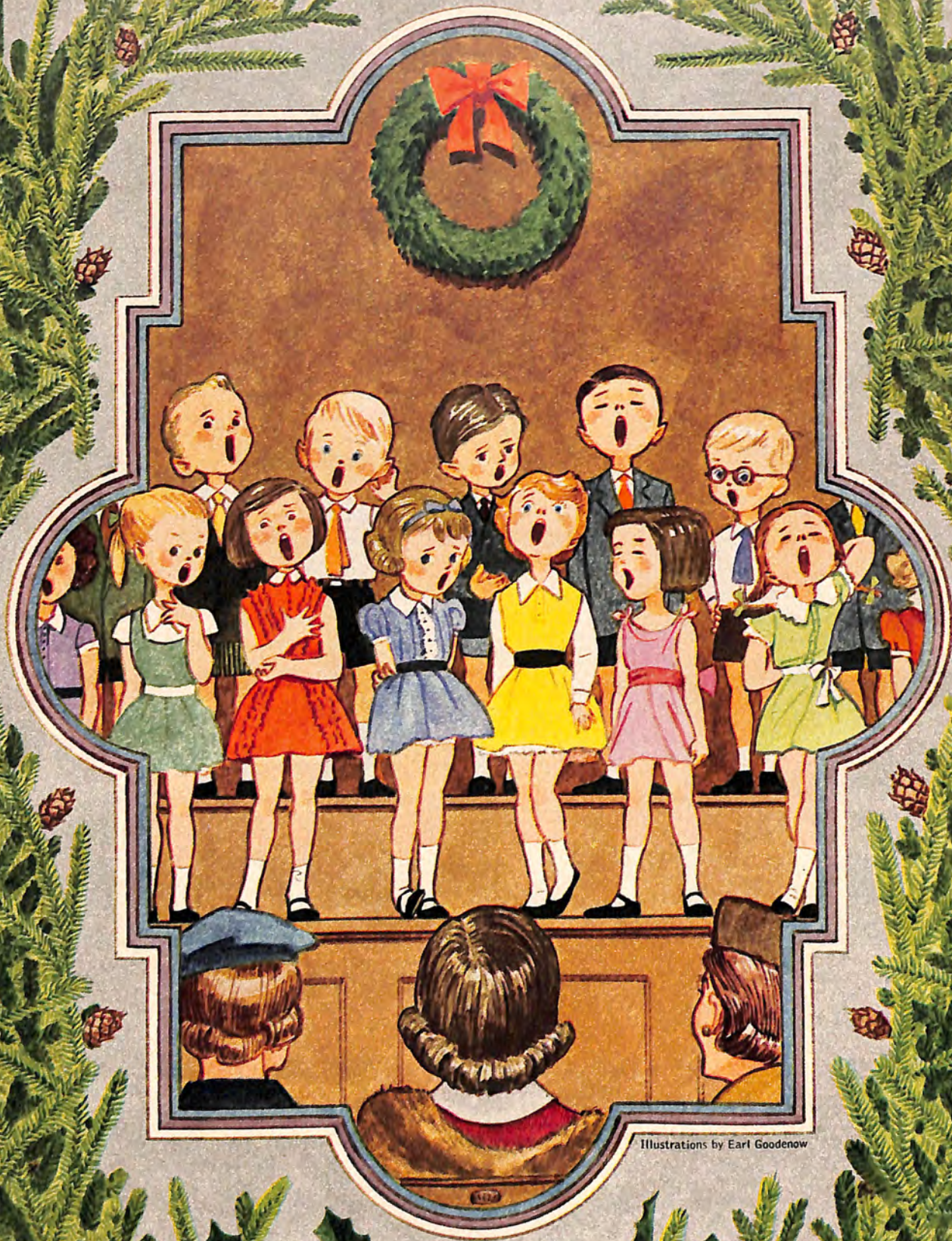




Illustrations by Earl Goodenow

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Emily had a lump in her throat as she listened to the young carolers

WOMAN'S DAY

A story by
VIRGINIA B. FEINE



By the Chimney with Care

Christmas! A fifth baby coming! And her husband far away!



ust one week to Christmas, thought Emily, driving home on Tuesday afternoon through the slow-moving traffic on Middleton Street, *and two weeks till John starts home.* And for the hundredth time she thought, *If only it could be the other way around.*

During the frequent pauses of the long line of cars she checked off errands . . . the gingerbread house from Stevens' . . . the glitter gloves to be exchanged for Judy . . . the chess book still on order at Doubleday's for Jack . . . the overseas-call time for John to be verified. She had been surprised when she learned that she had to request the call early in December—"because of the rush," and Emily wondered how many wives in Connecticut were trying to call husbands in Istanbul, for heaven's sake.

He'll be here, at least, when the baby is born, she thought. Only one month now. Doctor Jones had been cheerful about everything at her appointment this morning and still said it would be January eighteenth.

When old Mr. Clinton had asked John, early in November, to go to Istanbul to straighten out the

legal snarls in the offices of Clinton Tools there, they had never dreamed that he'd be away for Christmas. But delays and details had piled up until now it was clear that if he did fly home for the holiday, he'd have to return to finish up the Istanbul business afterward, and they'd chosen the lesser of two evils. He'd be all through by New Year's Eve. "Please God," added Emily to this thought.

And you couldn't overlook, she supposed, the fact that this assignment made John's prospects brighter than ever at Foster, Holloway and Foster, and might even add his name to the oldest law firm in the city.

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, clanked the chains on the tires as she turned west on Maple Avenue and left the heavy traffic behind.

I ought to get on home, she thought, *but I'll stop and have tea with Mother—it may help.*

As she turned into the driveway and saw lights in the library window, she felt comforted. A ridiculous house, really, with its turrets and porches and widow's walk, but how wise her mother had been in knowing, in spite of all good advice, that she wanted to keep it alive even after Doctor Joe's death, and that she was not the type for a small apartment and travel. She [Continued on page 87]

By the Chimney with Care

[Continued from page 25]

had kept it much the same as always, with the addition of a dozen or more chairs in the living room, for, as John said, her mother almost abused the right of free assembly. And it was her sons and daughters who traveled to her.

EMILY paused to examine the Christmas rose beside the front door and, sure enough, two buds were showing. She let herself in and called out, "Mrs. Emily Jordan to see Mrs. Julia Ames."

"Right with you," Julia called back from the kitchen. "Just bringing in tea. Go light the fire, like a lamb."

Emily went in, like a lamb, smiling at the familiar command. A newspaper fan was propped between the logs in the library fireplace, and she touched a match to it as her mother came in with the tea tray. She stood a minute, watching the flames rise and the logs catch, and then turned to watch her mother pour.

Julia carried out this small ceremony to perfection every day, being just a shade more meticulous about it when she was all alone than when she had guests. *How well she lives life*, thought Emily, as her mother handed her one of the blue-and-white Spode cups. She realized, not for the first time, that she often

felt maternal toward her mother and almost filial toward her own twelve-year-old Judy, so like her grandmother.

"It's very confusing," said Emily.

"Probably isn't at all," said her mother. "Tell me."

Emily laughed. "You and Judy are so alike. You hew to the main point in living, you don't have blurred edges like me. You aren't pushed around by details."

"You have, however, a few more details to cope with than either my granddaughter or I have," said Julia. She waited, as she had waited in other years, for Emily to come to the point.

Emily put down her cup and went over to stand before the fire.

"I just don't feel anything in my heart about the new baby," she said quietly. "It worries me."

"Should think it would," said Julia, and Emily was grateful to her for not arguing the reality of her distress.

"It's not that I don't want the baby," Emily went on. "It's just that I can't imagine another, can't dream about it, can't believe in it. I haven't even thought of names, but a miserable nickname, the Fifth Wheel, keeps coming into my mind. Did you ever feel this way?"

"May have," said Julia, "but I hon-

estly can't remember. We could say," she added, stirring her tea, "that you're tired—or that you want that gold-and-white party dress for Judy and figure skates for Jack and heaven knows what all for Sara and Ames, and that there's a conflict between Christmas spending and saving up for a baby. And we could add that it's hard that John had to be away just at this time. But that doesn't quite answer it, does it?"

"No," said Emily. "No, it doesn't."

"John's well?"

"Fine," said Emily, and dug in her pocket for the itinerary, though she was sure she knew it by heart now. "He'll be all through at Istanbul on the thirty-first, but can't get a plane until the next day, Tuesday. It leaves at 3 P.M. and gets him into Rome at 6:10 . . . then it leaves Rome at 7:00 and gets into Paris at 9:55. He takes off from Paris at 11:00 and lands in New York the next morning, Wednesday, at 7:45."

"You've decided against meeting him?" asked Julia.

Emily nodded. "I couldn't take them all, and it might be late and, anyway, John can get here a lot faster alone. We'll have two weeks together before the baby comes," she added.



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"You'll have two lifetimes afterward," said her mother.

A log broke and scattered sparks on the hearth, and Julia rose and swept the cinders back.

"By the way," she said with sudden briskness, "I'm knitting one of those loose white shawls for your newcomer, and I've started a yellow sweater. What are you making, just so we won't clash?"

"Oh, Mother," said Emily crossly. "For goodness' sake don't try to be subtle and lure me into the tiny-garments routine. I have on hand ten perfectly good sweaters, six carriage robes, seven never-worn dresses, and roughly, ninety-nine diapers."

"I just asked," said Julia, with a great show of calmness.

Emily laughed and bent awkwardly to kiss her mother's cheek. "Forgive me," she said, "for being churlish. I'll be all right. It's probably like the Christmas spirit," she added. "It has to creep up on you when you're not looking."

But driving home she felt alone and a little frightened. *It'll be different when John gets home*, she tried to think, but she knew it wouldn't. John's letters were full of talk about the new one, full of love and interest, and if her own blankness continued, it would be worse than ever—being close and still not sharing all the fun, the way they had with the others.

JUNIOR High vacation started on Wednesday at noon, and Judy came flying home to help with the cookies.

"You make better trees than I do," said Emily, untruthfully, carried away by the companionship of the moment.

"No, I don't," Judy mumbled, sampling a wreath cookie. "But thank you, anyway."

On Thursday, they all went to the fourth-grade play and applauded loyally when Jack, as First Tall Fir, welcomed the audience. Under the crepe-paper branches of his costume, in his breast pocket, was the cable from John that had come that morning, addressed to First Tall Fir and saying, "Wow 'em." Jackie was in two minds about the cable. "I love having it and all," he said, "but, boy, am I glad he didn't send it to the school!" And Emily could see his point.

Afterward, Emily congratulated Miss Evans, the music teacher, and Miss Gillette, whose fourth grade this year was as remarkable as ever, and on the way out Jenny Graham hailed her.

"Surviving?" asked Jenny.

"Just," Emily allowed.

"Can Jack and Ames and Sara come to us for lunch tomorrow after the carol singing and stay the afternoon with the twins? My sister's two are with me, and we might as well make it a party!"

"Bless you," said Emily. That would give her a chance to get out the tree ornaments and stockings in peace, and Judy wanted to help with it this year.

They all did, really, but Emily felt she needed a head start. She sent Jenny a look of "nicest-woman-I-know" as she got into the car.

Friday morning, Sara and Ames sang *We, Three Kings* and *Deck the Halls* and *O Little Town*, and Emily had a lump in her throat watching the first three grades, hearing the voices like spring peepers.

She waved to the children as they drove off in the Grahams' station wagon, and went on home. Judy had lunch ready for her—creamed chicken and salad and rolls, and Emily felt touched and guilty.

If ever a woman should be happy and grateful, she thought, I should. And it's all sort of going over my head and around me.

Several times Emily had thought of her mother's veiled hint that she make something for the baby and had rejected the idea as idiotic. *With all I've got to do for the others*, she thought. *And there isn't a single thing that's needed.*

AFTER lunch the phone rang, and the long-distance operator told Emily that there would be a circuit open for the call to Mr. John Jordan in Istanbul at eight o'clock, on Saturday morning, and that the charges would be twelve dollars, plus tax, for three minutes. *An expensive way to let him know I'm dreary*, thought Emily, for she knew she couldn't fool John with her voice.

"Now!" said Judy, leading the way, and they opened the old chest where all the Christmas treasures were kept.

"Here they are," sang Judy, pouncing, and she ran to the fireplace to hang the four stockings on the brass hooks, that, when you looked closely, were little cherubs, blowing trumpets. The stockings were alike in size and material—huge white cotton-flannel ones, with red-yarn blanket stitching around the tops, and red-yarn names and dates. Judy hung them, "just testing," in traditional order.

Emily took out the piece of flannel and the hank of red yarn that had been carefully wrapped in tissue and tucked into the chest, and began to unfold it. The stocking pattern fell out.

Turning from the fireplace, Judy said, "Just think—next year you'll have to make a fifth one. Two need new tapes," she added, starting toward the stairs.

Emily picked up the pattern. "I'm going to make the baby's stocking now," she said, out loud, though Judy had gone from the room.

By the time Judy came back, Emily had cut out the stocking halves, and was stitching the seams.

Judy crowed, "You're making it," and then begged, "Can we hang it up and put some toys and things in it?"

"I don't see why not," said Emily.

Judy rummaged in the chest and

brought up the treetop star. "It has five points," she said, her voice caressing it—"one for each of us."

The sewing machine whirled along the white flannel. "Don't get all the things out now," warned Emily. "You know the children want to help, too."

"About this baby," said Judy, ignoring the remark and still delving and bringing ornaments to light—"why don't we name him Quintus—that's Latin for fifth."

"Thank you," said Emily, in the tone with which she acknowledged the tidbits of information that came her way as the children progressed in school. "If it's a girl we'll call her Emily—and no nicknames."

She held up the finished stocking and threaded the yarn for trimming and name and date. "However," she added, "for the time being, we'll just pin a question mark on it, right here, and we can finish it when the baby comes."

But Judy was off again.

There were two more of the cherub hooks to hold the stockings, Emily remembered, and she found them at once in the tray of the chest. The tacks were there, too, remarkably, and she crossed to the mantel with hook and hammer. Right in the center, she thought, mindful of symmetry; and with the hook securely placed, she hung the stocking and stepped back to see the effect.

SHE felt the child within her move, and suddenly she knew and cherished this one, too, and longed to see it and to serve it. She looked at the stocking through swift tears and marveled at her own emotion and at her mother's rightness in knowing what was needed. She had made something now, especially for this child. So little a thing it was, she thought—but a symbol of hope and trust, asking for its owner a share of love and welcome—at once a distress signal and a banner unfurled.

"Judy," she called, "Judy, I've hung the baby's stocking!"

"Wonderful!" Judy called back, not having heard what Emily said, but catching the tone.

Emily went to the phone and called her mother. "I just wanted to say hello," said Emily, and her mother, too, caught the tone.

"Wonderful!" she said. "Why don't you have tea with me later and bring them all?"

"I can't," said Emily. "The three are at the Grahams'."

"Tomorrow, then," said Julia. She sounded contented.

"Yes. The call goes through to John tomorrow morning, at eight, and I'll call you after that."

"How do you feel?" asked her mother, and Emily knew the question was already answered. But she laughed and said, "Wonderful!"

(This story begins on page 24)

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Recipe #67—Yam Pecan Pie

Cream $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar and dash salt, till fluffy. Mash $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups cooked yams or 20 oz. canned yams, drained. Combine with 3 well-beaten eggs, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dark corn syrup, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and 1 cup pecan halves. Blend with butter-sugar mixture. Pour into unbaked pastry shell. Bake in 375° oven 50-55 minutes.

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